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FILM

Posted: Fri., Oct. 31, 2008, 4:51pm PT TALK BACK! DIGG EMAIL PRINT CONTACT RSS

Reykjavik Film Festival **Before Tomorrow** (Canada)

By ALISSA SIMON

An Alliance Film release of a Kunuk Cohn, Igloolik Isuma production, with the participation of Telefilm Canada, Sodec, Quebec Tax Credit, the Nunavut Film Commission, Canadian Tax Credit, with the collaboration of Nunavut Independent TV Network, Isamu TV. (International sales: Isuma Distribution, New York.) Produced by Stephane Rituit. Executive producers, Norman Cohn, Zacharias Kunuk. Directed by Marie-Helene Cousineau, Madeline Ivalu. Screenplay, Cousineau, Ivalu, Susan Avingaq, based on the novel "For Morgendagen" by Jorn Riel.

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With: Madeline Piujuq Ivalu, Paul-Dylan Ivalu, Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq, Mary Qulitalik, Tumasie Sivuarapik. (Inuktitut dialogue)

An Inuit boy and his beloved grandmother struggle to survive the Arctic wilderness in "Before Tomorrow," a profound, elemental and hauntingly beautiful period drama that makes an intimate story of endurance into a metaphor for an entire culture. Directed by Marie-Helene Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu, it's the first feature from the Arnait Video Collective, a group dedicated to documenting the unique knowledge and perspectives of Inuit women. Kudos and critical support should spur it along the international arthouse path blazed by "The Fast Runner," whose key creatives exec produce here.

Normally, convincing tales of Inuit culture are few and far between, so it's ironic that "Before Tomorrow" debuted a few weeks after Benoit Pilon's touching "The Necessities of Life" took the Montreal World Film Fest by storm. However, "Tomorrow" got a lift from its award for first Canadian feature Toronto, and is rumored to be at the upcoming Sundance fest.

Set circa 1840 in Canada's far north, the action unfolds at a time when some Inuit populations had yet to encounter white people. During a summer gathering of various clans, those who did come in contact with the strange foreigners describe their peculiar ways and show off the strong needles and sharp knives they obtained from them.

Made uneasy by this contact with outsiders, wise elder Ningiuq (Ivalu) and her ailing friend Kutuguq (Mary Qulitalik) take on the task of drying their clan's cache of fish in preparation for the long winter. They're accompanied to the isolated island designated for this chore by Ningiuq's bright eyed, 10-year-old grandson, Maniq (Paul-Dylan Ivalu). Maniq's father promises to fetch them before the water freezes over, but as the fall hunting season ends and he fails to return, Ningiuq finds her worst fears confirmed.

Incorporating themes including the cycle of life and the history of contact between aboriginal peoples and European settlers, the deceptively simple script (by the co-helpers and Susan Avingaq) brilliantly reflects the cultural and spiritual values of the Inuits. In particular, the traditional stories Ningiuq tells her grandson take on a heart-rending resonance.

Graced by unadorned perfs from Madeline Ivalu (a featured player in "The Fast Runner" and "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen"), her real-life grandson and the supporting cast, the thesping feels appropriately timeless yet emotionally precise.

Splendid on-location lensing by Norman Cohn and Felix Lajeunesse contrasts bountiful summer with harsh winter. Superior craft contributions emphasize tradition and authenticity, from the well-worn caribou and seal-skin clothing and intricate facial tattoos to elaborate period props. Sole anachronism is the lilting, lightly used French and English ballad score by Canuck folkies Kate and Anna McGarrigle.

Camera (color, HD-to-35mm), Norman Cohn, Felix Lajeunesse; editors, Norman Cohn, Cousineau, Lajeunesse, Louise Dugal; music, Kate McGarrigle, Anna McGarrigle, Arnaud Derimay; production designer, Suzan Avingaq; costume designer, Attuat Akkitirq, sound (Dolby SR), Richard Lavoie, Arnaud Derimay. Reviewed on DVD, Chicago, October 26, 2008. (In Reykjavik, Toronto film festivals.) Running time: 93 MIN.

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